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ABSTRACT

A study sought to describe the nature of teacher and student behaviors related to textbook reading assignments at the secondary school level, and to explore the relationship between the amount of time secondary school teachers devoted to specific assignment-related behaviors and students' subsequent performance on the assignments. The sample included 10 seventh, eighth, and ninth grade social studies teachers who were observed seven or eight times within a 8-week period. The results indicated that the teachers allocated 46% of the total observed time to the following assignment-making behavior: presenting (22%), monitoring (20%), and oral feedback (4%). This represented more than twice the amount of time teachers spent in lecturing/discussing and small group conferences, combined. Textbook assignments that required students to read and write answers to questions appeared to "drive" the lesson. The amount of time teachers spent presenting textbook-related reading assignments correlated positively and significantly with students' performance on the assignments. The amount of time a teacher spent presenting an assignment did not relate to students' attitudes. Finally, neither the time teachers spent in monitoring nor the time spent in giving feedback on assignments related significantly to student performance or attitude. (HTH)

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Textbook Reading Assignments at the Secondary Level: Relating Teacher Behaviors to Student Performance and Attitude

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Research linking teaching behavior to student outcomes has produced a considerable body of knowledge about the relationship between reading instruction and achievement in the early grades (Anderson, Evertson, and Brophy, 1978; Leinhardt, Zigmond, and Cooley, 1981; McDonald and Elias, 1976). However, only a few studies have been extended to the junior high (Evertson, Anderson, and Brophy, 1978) and high school levels (Stallings, Cory, Fairweather, and Needels, 1978). The virtual neglect of an entire age group--youngsters aged 10 through 15--prompted Congress in 1980 to identify research on the education of early adolescents as a priority for the National Institute of Education. However, shortly thereafter due to the massive budget cuts sustained by the Institute, all new activity was either postponed or cancelled (AERA SIG/EA Newsletter, 1981).

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Nevertheless, the need still exists to investigate the kinds of classroom teaching behaviors, particularly those related to reading, that promote optimum learning among early adolescents. Brophy (1979) has argued in favor of moving beyond the large field observation studies (which relate verbal process measures to student performance on standardized achievement tests) to context-specific observation studies. For example, Brophy stressed the need to study such important but as yet unknown influences on student learning as teacher behavior during the time work is assigned. With the exception of Brophy, Rohrkemper, Rashid, and Goldberger (1982) and Durkin (1978-79), however, very little research has been devoted to investigating teacher behaviors as they occur in the specific context of making classroom reading assignments. Furthermore, since both Brophy and Durkin observed elementary teachers, their findings did not generalize to the secondary level.

Consequently, the present observation study had two primary objectives: 1) to describe the nature of teacher and student behaviors related to textbook reading assignments at the secondary level, and 2) to explore the relationship between the amount of time secondary teachers devoted to specific assignment-related behaviors and students' subsequent performance on the assignments. A minor objective was to assess whether students' attitudes were influenced by selected teacher behaviors.

Specifically, the following questions were investigated: 1) How much time do secondary teachers devote to presenting, monitoring, and giving oral feedback on textbook-related assignments? 2) Does the amount of time teachers spend presenting, monitoring, and giving feedback relate to students' subsequent performance on content area reading assignments? 3) Are students' attitudes toward teachers' presenting, monitoring, and

feedback behaviors related to the amount of time teachers spend in each of these activities?

Method

The sample included ten 7th, 8th, and 9th grade social studies teachers who taught predominantly white, middle- to upper middle-class children with above average reading ability. Each teacher was observed 7 or 8 times within an eight-week period.

Observation Procedure

Three trained observers (all of whom were former teachers) alternated their visits to each of the 10 classrooms, and for 15 of the lessons pairs of observers sat in the same class but independently recorded data. Estimates of inter-observer agreement ranged from 78 percent to 91 percent.

The observation instrument used in this study was adapted from one developed by Anderson (1979). Each time the teacher engaged in a new behavior, a record was made of the time and of the materials students were using. Also, the observer recorded what the teacher was saying and/or doing. The coding of student behaviors represented what more than half the students were doing at a given point in time. This rough estimate was deemed sufficient since student behavior data were used descriptively and not as outcome measures.

Outcome Measures

Short-term outcome measures used in the study were classified as two types: cognitive and affective. The cognitive measures included the classroom teacher's and the observer's ratings of student performance on each day's reading assignment, or any portion thereof in instances where

one assignment was spread over more than one lesson. Teachers and observers rated from 1 (low) to 5 (high) their impression of how successful students had been in completing each assignment based on these three criteria: student attention (engagement), interest, and learning.

The affective measure was the Adjective Rating Scale (ARS) (Kelly, Chapman, Pascarella, and Terenzini, 1976). It consisted of 24 adjectives which students rated on a 4-point scale (1 = extremely, 2 = very, 3 = somewhat, 4 = not at all) against each of the following three stimuli: "In this lesson I thought the amount of time the teacher spent presenting (monitoring, giving feedback on) textbook-related reading assignments was _____." Students completed separate ARS forms for each of the 3 stimuli. Factor analyses have indicated that the ARS represents a trait space composed of 5 factors: practical value, emotional appeal, dullness, interest, and difficulty. Within each factor are several adjectives which define its parameters. For example, characteristic adjectives for the "practical value" factor include the following: necessary, valuable, and practical. Reliability estimates for internal consistency (alpha coefficients) ranged from .87 to .60 with a mean of .78. The ARS was administered only 20 times during the course of the study because of the time required for students to complete it.

Results and Discussion

The results are based on data collected from 74 observed social studies lessons taught by 7th ($n = 20$), 8th ($n = 32$) and 9th ($n = 22$) grade teachers. A preliminary analysis to test the relationships among the outcome measures indicated that classroom teachers and observers generally agreed ($r = .52$, $p < .001$) in their overall impressions of how successful

students were in completing assignments. However, the teachers' ratings of student performance correlated more closely with student attitudes ($r = .45$, $p < .05$) than did the observers' ratings ($r = .29$, $p > .10$). This would be expected given that teachers are more likely than observers to be sensitive to their students' feelings.

The teachers in this study allocated 46 percent of the total observed time (3,487 minutes) to the following assignment-making behaviors: presenting (22 percent), monitoring (20 percent), and oral feedback (4 percent). This represented more than twice the amount of time teachers spent in lecturing/discussing and small group conferencing combined. What appeared to be occurring was this: textbook assignments which required students to read and write answers to questions appeared to "drive" the lesson. That is, the assignment provided the context for the rest of the lesson rather than vice versa. This observation fits well with the research on teacher thinking and teacher decision making which suggests that classroom activities themselves provide the flow of instruction (Shavelson and Stern, 1981). The students knew the routine, and the teachers observed in this study rarely deviated from it. It was rare, for instance, to observe students actively engaged in discussion or small group projects of any kind.

The amount of time teachers spent in presenting textbook-related reading assignments (e.g., "read pages 271-277 and then answer worksheet questions 1-6 ...don't forget to...") correlated positively and significantly with students' performance on the assignments. This pattern held regardless of whether it was the classroom teacher ($r = .39$, $p < .001$) or the observer ($r = .44$, $p < .001$) who rated students' overall success in completing the assignments. Interestingly, this finding conflicts

with evidence reported in a recent study by Brophy and his colleagues (1982). In that study, contrary to what the researchers had expected, student engagement time increased when teachers decreased the amount of time spent in making presentation statements. Several factors may have accounted for this discrepancy in findings. One, as Brophy et al. noted, their findings were based on only 6 classrooms, and those classrooms were at the 4th, 5th, and 6th grade levels. Two, observers in their study only recorded presentation data that dealt with teachers' communicated attitudes or expectations about the task; they did not record teachers' procedural statements or directions as well.

The amount of time a teacher spent presenting an assignment did not relate to students' attitudes (or how positively/negatively they felt about the practicality, for example, of that particular teacher variable). Finally, neither the time teachers spent in monitoring nor giving feedback on assignments related significantly to student performance or attitude. The fact that student attitude failed to show a relationship to any of the teacher behaviors under investigation may have been due to the low incidence of ARS administrations. This was a known but necessary limitation of the study.

The educational implications of the present investigation extend beyond the descriptive data just discussed. In order to understand what it is that teachers do when they present an assignment that subsequently influences students' performance in a positive way, it will be necessary to take a more in-depth look at presenting behaviors. Also, given the fact that so little time was spent in actually discussing content area reading assignments, it may be advantageous to study more closely the

interaction patterns which occur between teachers and students, perhaps from a sociolinguistic perspective.

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